

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Does the Need for Better Continuity Planning Continue?

Committee to Re-Examine Federal Continuity of Operations Planning

**What: Government Reform Committee Oversight Hearing:
“Who’s Watching the COOP? A Re-Examination of Federal
Agencies’ Continuity of Operations Plans”**

When: THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2005, 2:00 P.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

During an April 2004 hearing, the Committee found significant inadequacies in the federal continuity of operations planning (COOP) process. Concerns were raised that the federal government may not be able to remain fully functional in the event of a severe natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency. This hearing will review what progress the Executive Branch has made in the last year to develop effective COOP planning to ensure continuation of essential agency functions in the event of a disruptive disaster or attack.

COOP planning is a vital element of national security planning in the post-9/11 environment due to the ongoing threat of emergencies, be they terrorist attacks or natural disasters. In short, every federal agency that performs functions essential for the safety and welfare of the American people needs to be fully prepared to cope with any crisis, man-made or natural, that might disrupt operations.

After last year’s hearing, the Committee asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to assess the progress made by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the executive agent responsible for the Federal government’s COOP readiness, and each federal agency in identifying essential functions and in developing effective continuity plans. The first step in effective continuity planning is to identify the “essential” functions an agency must provide in emergencies. **GAO reported that the**

breadth and depth of essential functions by federal agencies varied widely. In addition, GAO found that FEMA had not provided sufficient guidance to federal agencies on how to identify essential functions.

The Committee is interested in hearing how FEMA is monitoring and measuring COOP readiness, the current status of Federal agencies' compliance with COOP planning directives and whether the new guidance contained in Federal Preparedness Circular (FPC) 65 - which sets the criteria for agencies to develop their plans and designates timelines for submission of agency plans - is helping agencies clarify their essential functions, and whether additional steps may be required to ensure agency compliance with FPC 65.

The Committee also will focus on how telework, the ability to allow employees to work at a location other than their official duty stations, can be used to enhance federal COOP readiness. FEMA acknowledged the usefulness of this concept in its revised FPC 65: "Maximum use should be made of existing agency local or field infrastructures, and consideration should also be given to other options such as telecommuting locations, work-at-home agreements, virtual offices, and joint or shared facilities."¹ This is a logical solution to the problem of deploying necessary human capital during a crisis that will likely render primary facilities unusable.

Unfortunately, GAO stated that only a small fraction of agencies reported that they planned to use telework in a COOP situation. This is not necessarily surprising given that the original FPC 65 did not mention telework. Nevertheless, GAO further stated that neither the new FEMA guidance, nor guidance issued by the Office of Personnel Management, the federal telework executive agent, addresses the preparation necessary for an effective telework program. The Committee will address the role of telework in federal COOP preparedness under the revised FEMA guidance.

WITNESSES

Panel One:

Mr. Reynold N. Hoover, Director, Office of National Security Coordination, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Ms. Marta Brito Perez, Associate Director, Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Ms. Linda Koontz, Director, Information Management, U.S. Government Accountability Office

Panel Two:

Dr. James A. Kane, President and CEO, Systems and Software Consortium

¹ FPC 65, p.E-1.

Ms. Julie Williams, Director, Internet Business Solutions Group, Federal Civilian Agency
Practice, Cisco Systems

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